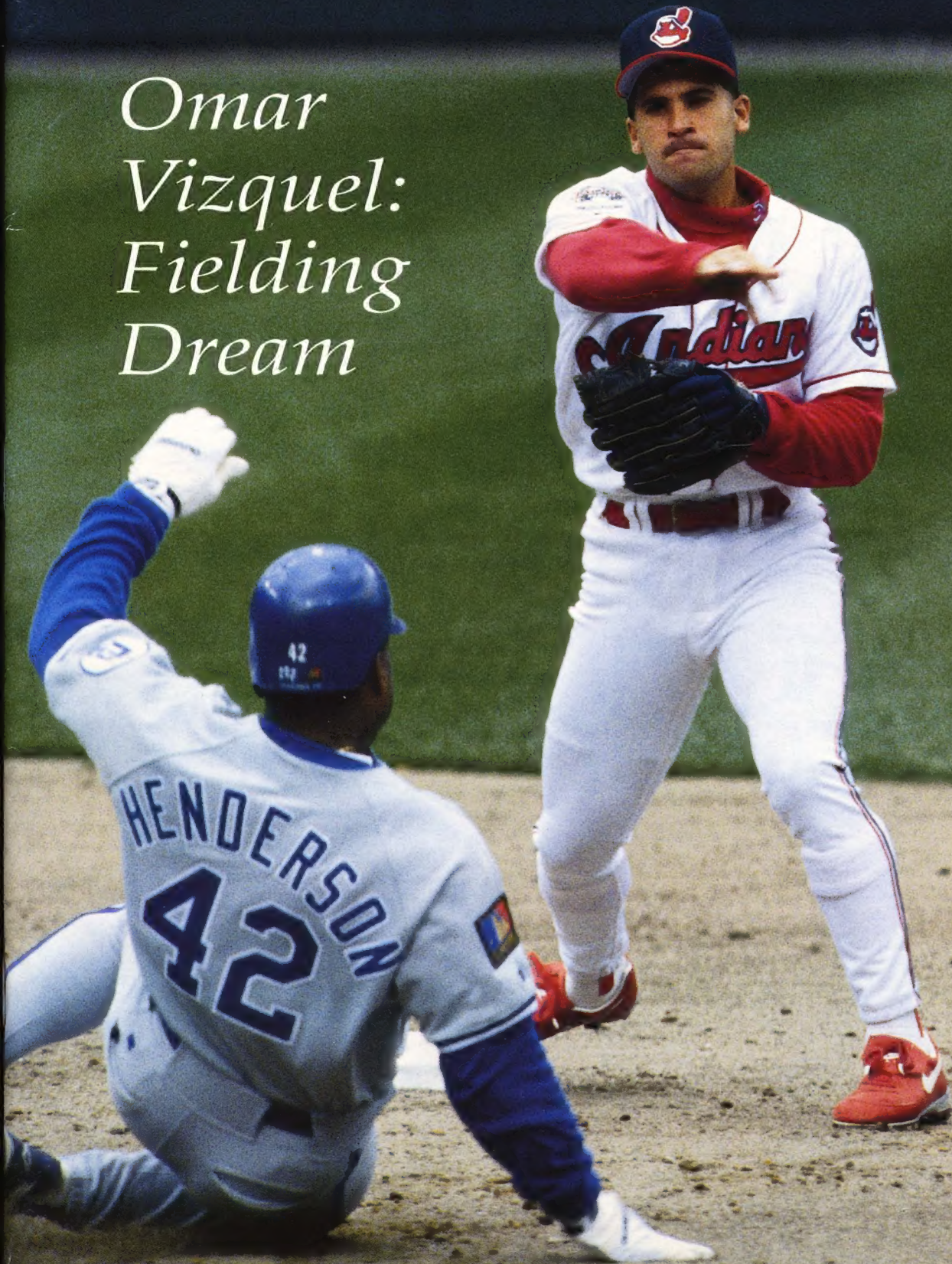


GAME FACE

INDIANS SCOREBOOK MAGAZINE

*Omar
Vizquel:
Fielding
Dream*

Vol. 8 No. 3



\$2.00

Indians



INAUGURAL
JACOBS
FIELD
SEASON 1994

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by Russell Schneider

Seattle Mariner fans consider the day Omar Vizquel put on an Indians uniform as "Black Monday," but it marked a promise of sunshine in Cleveland's future.

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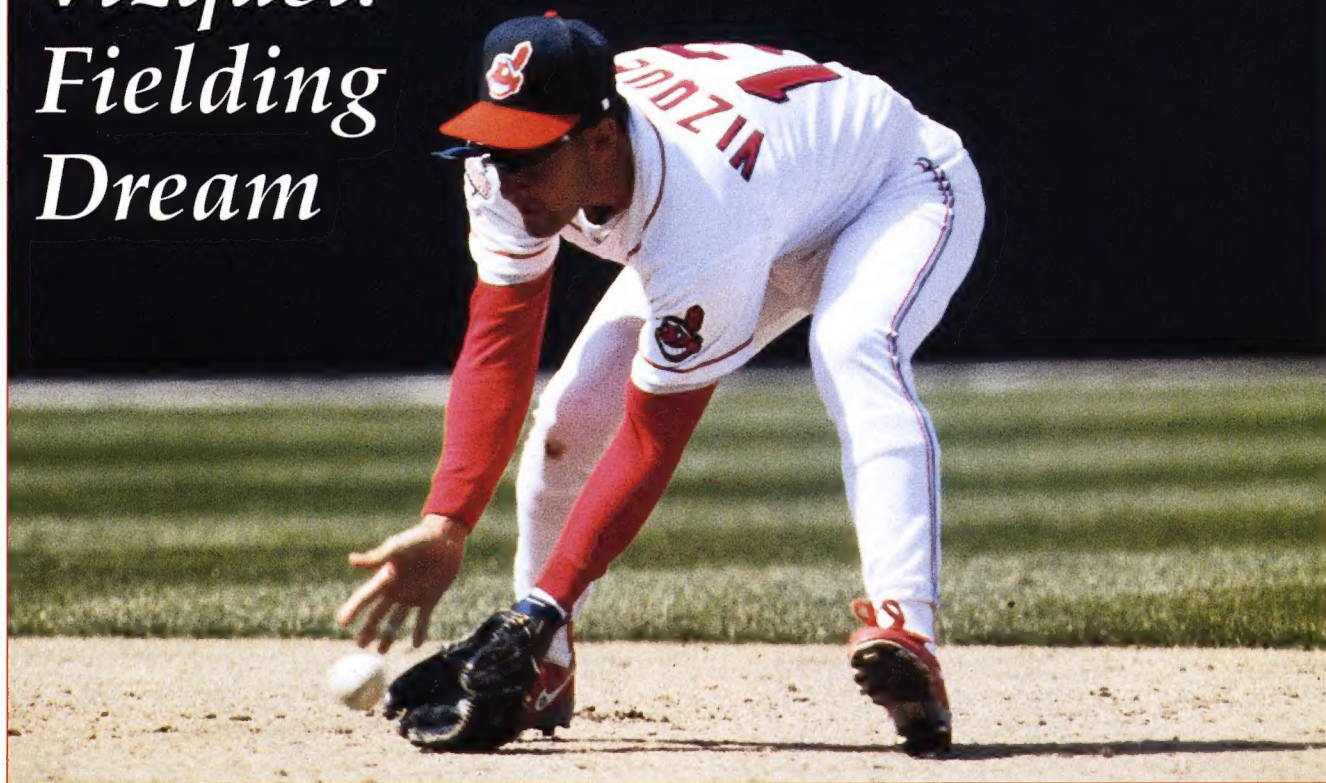
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Omar Vizquel: Fielding Dream



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By Russell Schneider

Omar Vizquel sat in front of his locker and quietly answered all of the questions.

All of them.

Vizquel didn't smile as broadly as he had a few hours earlier, but neither did he hang his head and sulk.

Or make excuses.

Or hide out in the trainer's room until the media—with their probing questions—went away.

"I've made two errors in a game before, but never three," said Vizquel, a Gold Glove winner in 1993 who, before the game, listened to praise that had been directed his way by Manager Mike Hargrove who called him "the best shortstop in the American League."

This was after the Indians ninth game of the young season, April 16, when Vizquel's embarrassing and costly errors resulted in seven unearned runs and a 12-9 victory for the Kansas City Royals. It was a fielding nightmare for Cleveland's fielding dream.

At noon on that very day—in what turned out to be a master stroke of irony—Vizquel sat on the same chair in front of the same locker in the Indians clubhouse and acknowledged Hargrove's plaudits.

"Omar makes plays that only one other shortstop in baseball can make, and that's Ozzie Smith (of the St. Louis Cardinals)," said Hargrove. "He is the American League version of Smith... he is an absolute magician with the glove."

Then, to emphasize his point, Hargrove went further in his praise for the player the Tribe acquired last Dec. 20 in a trade with the Seattle Mariners for Felix Fermin and Reggie Jefferson.

That was the day, incidentally, that was—and still is—referred to as "Black Monday" by Mariners' fans who were disappointed by the departure of the popular player.

"When the Baltimore Orioles were winning all those league championships in the 1970s, one of the keys to their success, in my opinion, was Mark Belanger," Hargrove said.

"Belanger didn't hit much... I don't think his lifetime average was even .230 (it was .228). But he also was a magician with his glove and I'm sure the Orioles would have been as good without him."

Neither, in Hargrove's opinion, would the Indians be nearly as good as everyone anticipates they'll be without Vizquel, his disastrous performance in that early-season game against the Royals notwithstanding.

"Everything considered, Vizquel is at least as good as Belanger, maybe even better. Belanger probably had a little stronger arm, but Omar certainly will hit more," continued the manager.

"Omar is not a home run hitter, but that's not to say he isn't a good offensive player. He's a guy who puts the ball in play. The big thing is that he's got to lay off the high pitches. If he does that, Omar can be a very effective hitter."

"Something else that he does for us is that he's so good for (third baseman) Jim Thome and (second baseman) Carlos Baerga. Because of his range and overall ability, Omar makes both of them better, which improves us as a team."

Hargrove paused for a moment, then added, "Do I need to say more, or have I made my point?"

Indeed he did.

All of which Vizquel accepted graciously. "I am very pleased and flattered," said the 5-9, 165-pound Venezuelan who turned 27 on April 24. "I am very happy to be here. I love the team, our new park, and the city."

"I used to think that Baltimore's stadium (Oriole Park at Camden Yards) was the best place, but this (Jacobs Field) is better."

Vizquel said he is especially happy to be playing on natural grass, instead of the synthetic turf in the Kingdome where he first joined the Mariners in 1989.

Vizquel's comment about his happiness to be with the Indians evoked a question that pertained to remarks attributed to him in a *Baseball America* article shortly after he was traded to the Tribe.

The headline on the story said it all: "Vizquel not thrilled about new address."

"The writer who wrote that misunderstood me," he says now. "Mainly, I was surprised to be traded to Cleveland. I heard rumors that I would be going somewhere, not because the Mariners didn't like me, but because of money. They were cutting back on their payroll."

"I'd heard that the (New York) Mets wanted me, but I didn't know the Indians also were interested. That's what surprised me."

"Now I am glad, very happy to be here," Vizquel said again. He wasn't the only one surprised by the deal.

When Indians General Manager John Hart closed the deal for Vizquel, his counterpart with the Mets, Joe McIlvaine, was openly disappointed and had plenty to say in the media.

McIlvaine was quoted in the *New York Times* that his three months long attempts to get Vizquel "was like a wheel spinning... like chasing the tail of a cat."

Vizquel, who had filed for arbitration last winter, signed a one-year contract with the Indians that reportedly will pay him a \$2.3 million salary, fourth highest on the team. He will be eligible for free agency in 1996, but indicated he's close to signing a long-term contract with the Indians.

"That (a new contract) is something I leave to my agent. We are not trying to hold the Indians up," he said. "They made me an offer before I left Venezuela, but it wasn't exactly what I want."

"I hope something can be worked out because I want to stay in Cleveland. I like it here and all I want

"I used to think that Baltimore's stadium (Oriole Park at Camden Yards) was the best place, but this (Jacobs Field) is better."



© Gregory Drezdron, 1994



is to be paid according to the going rate. I think we will get together and work things out."

There's no doubt Hart wants to keep Vizquel in Cleveland as much as Vizquel wants to stay with the Indians.

"The first thing Omar said to me when I met him in Venezuela was, 'Please don't trade me,'" said Hart. "I told him we didn't get him to trade him."

Though Vizquel's batting average fell from a career high .294 in 1992 to .255 last season, he more than made up for it with his defensive prowess.

"If I hit .250 and field like I know I can, I think that would be very good," he said, then quickly qualified his remark.

"That is not to say I have set .250 as my goal. I want to hit more. I think I can. After I hit .294 the pitchers made a lot of adjustment on me last year. They are not dumb, and neither am I.

"Now it is up to me to adjust to what they are doing, how they are pitching to me, and to keep on fielding good."

Which will be fine with the Indians.

"I could sit and watch Omar field grounders all day long." — Buddy Bell, Indians Infield Coach and six-time Gold Glove winner.

Vizquel's career as a professional began in 1984. He was signed by the Mariners as a free agent in Venezuela where, incidentally, one of his coaches in amateur baseball was former Tribesman Vic Davalillo.

Davalillo played for the Indians from 1963-68, and later with California, the St. Louis Cardinals, Pittsburgh, Oakland and Los Angeles, retiring in 1980 after 16 seasons in the major leagues.

Vizquel spent five years in the minors before opening the 1989 season in Seattle. He was back in the minors for part of 1990, but the following year returned to the Mariners to stay and quickly established himself as one of the AL's premier shortstops.

Though his batting average slipped 39 points last season, Vizquel more than made up for it with his defensive prowess.

Tribe coach Buddy Bell, a six-time Gold Glove winning third baseman during his Major League career, perhaps put it into perspective best.

"I could sit and watch Omar field grounders all day long," said Bell.

This, of course, was before Vizquel committed those three errors against the Royals.

But nobody's opinion of the shortstop was lessened after that performance.

As Hargrove said in the wake of the defeat, "I am not a betting man, but if I were, I'd bet that never happens to Omar again."

Editor's Note: Look for Vizquel to be back in action off the disabled list in the coming weeks.





ALBERT BELLE



CARLOS BAERGA

Credit: Gregory Drezdson, all photos

Voting for the starters in the Major League Baseball All-Star Game is a fan tradition that has grown to the largest citizen participation program (besides State and National elections) in the U.S. Last year more than 8 million fans cast their votes for the best to play in the 64th annual All-Star Game. In 1994, a record number of ballots cast is anticipated as Texaco, a longtime supporter of premier sporting events in the U.S., assumes "Presenting Sponsor" status for the most popular All-Star Fan Balloting program in professional sports.

"We're delighted to have Texaco as a national marketing partner of Major League Baseball," said Ken Schanzer, President and CEO of The Baseball Network, the new national television and marketing organization of MLB. "All-Star Fan Balloting is a terrific grassroots program and with Texaco's participation, we're looking for this program to go to its highest level."

Said Texaco Refining and Marketing Inc. President Tom M. Matthews, "Texaco is pleased to be a charter sponsor of The Baseball Network and the Presenting Sponsor of All-Star Fan Balloting. We believe our involvement with The Baseball Network will further enhance our aggressive marketing programs, which feature our company's widely recognized and technologically advanced brands, while extending the All-Star team voting opportunity to baseball fans who otherwise may not have the chance to vote for their favorite players."

Texaco estimates that more than 12,000 participating Texaco-branded outlets in the U.S., Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico will serve as primary voting locations for fans seeking to cast ballots for the starting lineups for the American and National League All-Star Teams. In addition, customers visiting participating Texaco stations will have the opportunity to enter a sweepstakes (where permitted by state law) in which numerous baseball related prizes will be awarded. The 1994 All-Star Game will be played

Tuesday, July 12, in Pittsburgh, and telecast on NBC, at 8:00pm (Eastern Time).

In addition to all participating Texaco-branded retail outlets, All-Star Fan Balloting will be conducted at select retail outlets that carry Texaco's Havoline Motor Oil products, and at all 28 Major League stadiums and more than 100 minor league parks. More than 60 million ballots will be circulated during the promotional time period.

All-Star Fan Balloting will be launched May 9th at Texaco stations and baseball stadiums across the U.S. and Canada. Balloting will continue through the end of June. In early July, the starters for the 65th annual Mid-Summer Classic will be revealed. All-Star Game

managers (Cito Gaston and Philadelphia's Jim Fregosi), in conjunction with the League Presidents, are responsible for selecting the reserves and pitchers.

Players who appear on the Texaco ballots have been nominated by general managers of all 28 Major League clubs. Should an unheralded player emerge during the early season as an

All-Star caliber performer, fans have the option of entering his name as a write-in candidate.

Last year's top vote-getters were Barry Bonds in the NL, with 3,074,603 votes, and Ken Griffey, Jr., in the AL, with 2,696,918 votes.

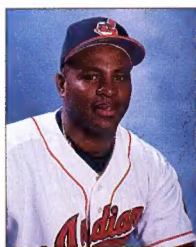
As an official sponsor of The Baseball Network, Texaco will receive promotional rights to conduct baseball-licensed consumer, employee and dealer promotions throughout the season.

The Baseball Network, which is responsible for the network television production, advertising sales and corporate sponsorships of Major League Baseball, will debut with the July 12 All-Star Game telecast on NBC. A 12-game prime time "Game of the Week" series and all post-season playoff action, including the 91st World Series, will be produced by The Baseball Network.

**TEXACO
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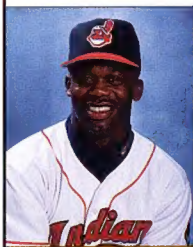


Indians



8
Albert Belle
 B: Right
 T: Right
 Born: 8/25/66

Resides: Euclid, OH



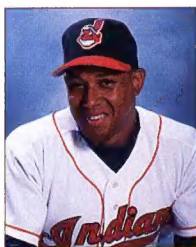
35
Wayne Kirby
 B: Left
 T: Right
 Born: 1/22/64

Resides: Yorktown, VA



7
Kenny Lofton
 B: Left
 T: Left
 Born: 5/31/67

Resides: Tucson, AZ



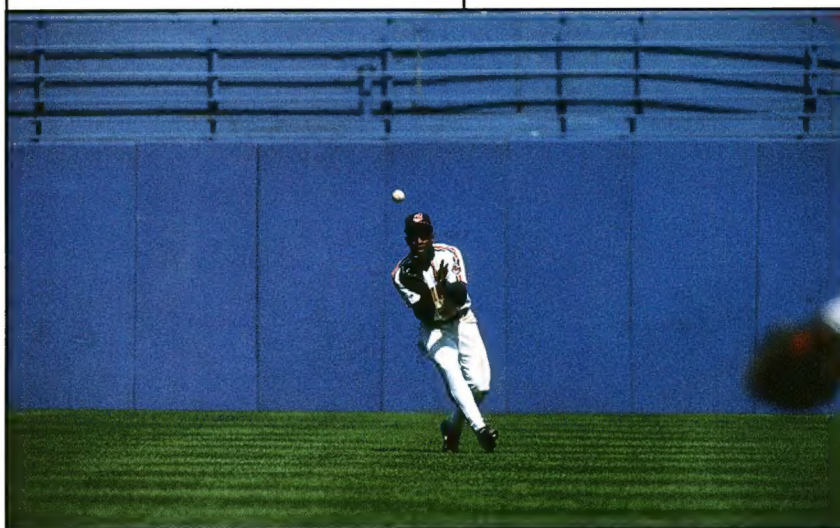
22
Candy Maldonado
 B: Right
 T: Right
 Born: 9/5/60

Resides: Arecibo, PR

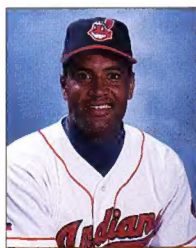


24
Manny Ramirez
 B: Right
 T: Right
 Born: 5/30/72

Resides: Brooklyn, NY

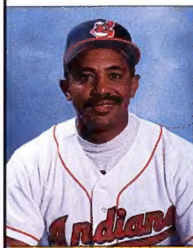


Credit: Gregory Drezdson



15
Sandy Alomar
 B: Right
 T: Right
 Born: 6/18/66

Resides: Westlake, OH



17
Tony Pena
 B: Right
 T: Right
 Born: 6/4/57

Resides: Santiago, DR

Indians



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Indians Executive Vice President and General Manager John Hart poses with the Tribe's pair of "Silver Sluggers"—Carlos Baerga and Albert Belle.